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 1988 Slive: 395–398, repro.
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1942.9.59 (655)

Rembrandt van Rijn (and Workshop?)

The Apostle Paul

c. 1657
 Oil on canvas, 131.5 x 104.4 (51¼ x 41⅞)
 Widener Collection

Inscriptions

On desk at right: *Rembrandt f*

Technical Notes: The original support is a medium-weight, plain-weave fabric with non-original triangular fabric inserts in the lower left and lower right corners. Another diagonal insert with yet another weave pattern and ground has been added to the upper left. The support and inserts have been lined with the tacking margins trimmed. No cusping is visible, suggesting a reduction in dimensions on all sides.

A moderately thick, off-white ground was applied in a roughly oval form, with the upper right of the oval unfinished. The oval shape once extended below and substantially above the present confines of the composition (figs. 5 and 6). An oversized canvas may have been selectively primed with the intent to trim it to an oval shape and mount it on a smaller or shaped stretcher. At some point, however, this idea seems to have been abandoned and the composition was reconceived in a rectangular format. Original paint covers both primed and unprimed sections of the rectangular support.

The application pattern of the ground is visible in the x-radiograph, along with several artist's changes. Initially the apostle's elbow rested on a book lying on an inclined lectern. Minor changes are found in the proper right shoulder and adjacent to the proper left arm.

Paint was applied thinly in dark passages and thickly in light passages, with brushes and a palette knife. Flesh tones are heavily impasted and blended wet into wet. Severe abrasion in thinly painted passages has exposed the ground layer, and thicker passages are moderately abraded. Heavy retouching is found throughout, especially on the triangular corner inserts, which appear to be primarily later repaint. A thick, discolored, natural resin varnish covers the surface. No conservation work has been carried out since acquisition.

Provenance: Johan van Schuylenburg, The Hague; (sale, The Hague, 20 September 1735, no. 31). Marquis de Livois [d. 1790], Angers; (sale, Angers, 1791, no. 65). Gamba; (sale, Paris, 17 December 1811, no. 26). Ferdinando Marescalchi, Bologna, by 1824. Sir George Hayter; (sale, Christie & Manson, London, 3 May 1845, no. 82). M. le comte de Pourtalès-Gorgier, Paris; (sale, "son hôtel," Paris, 27 March–4 April 1865, no. 182). Lord Wimborne [formerly Sir Ivor Guest, 1835–1914], Canford Manor, Dorsetshire; (Arthur J. Sulley & Co., London); Peter A. B. Widener, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania by 1912; inheritance from Estate of Peter A. B. Widener by gift through power of appointment of Joseph E. Widener, Elkins Park.

Exhibited: British Institution, London, 1841, no. 71 (as *Portrait of Cornelius Pietersz Hoofi*). Washington 1969, no. 17.

SITTING BEFORE A TABLE in the recesses of his prison cell, Saint Paul has brought his hand to his head as he ponders the words he is about to write in the epistle that lies before him. The weighty expression of his strong features underscores the depth of his belief and the purposefulness of his mission to spread Christianity to the heathen. The sword visible above the book is as much the "sword of the Spirit," the term he used to describe the word of God in his letter to the Ephesians, as it is the symbol of his military might before his conversion or the foreboding of his eventual martyrdom.

This large and imposing painting from the late 1650s depicts a figure that preoccupied Rembrandt throughout his life, from his 1627 *Saint Paul in Prison* (fig. 1), to his moving 1661 representation of himself in the guise of Saint Paul (fig. 2). As is evident from



Fig. 1. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Saint Paul in Prison*, 1627, oil on panel, Stuttgart, Staatsgalerie

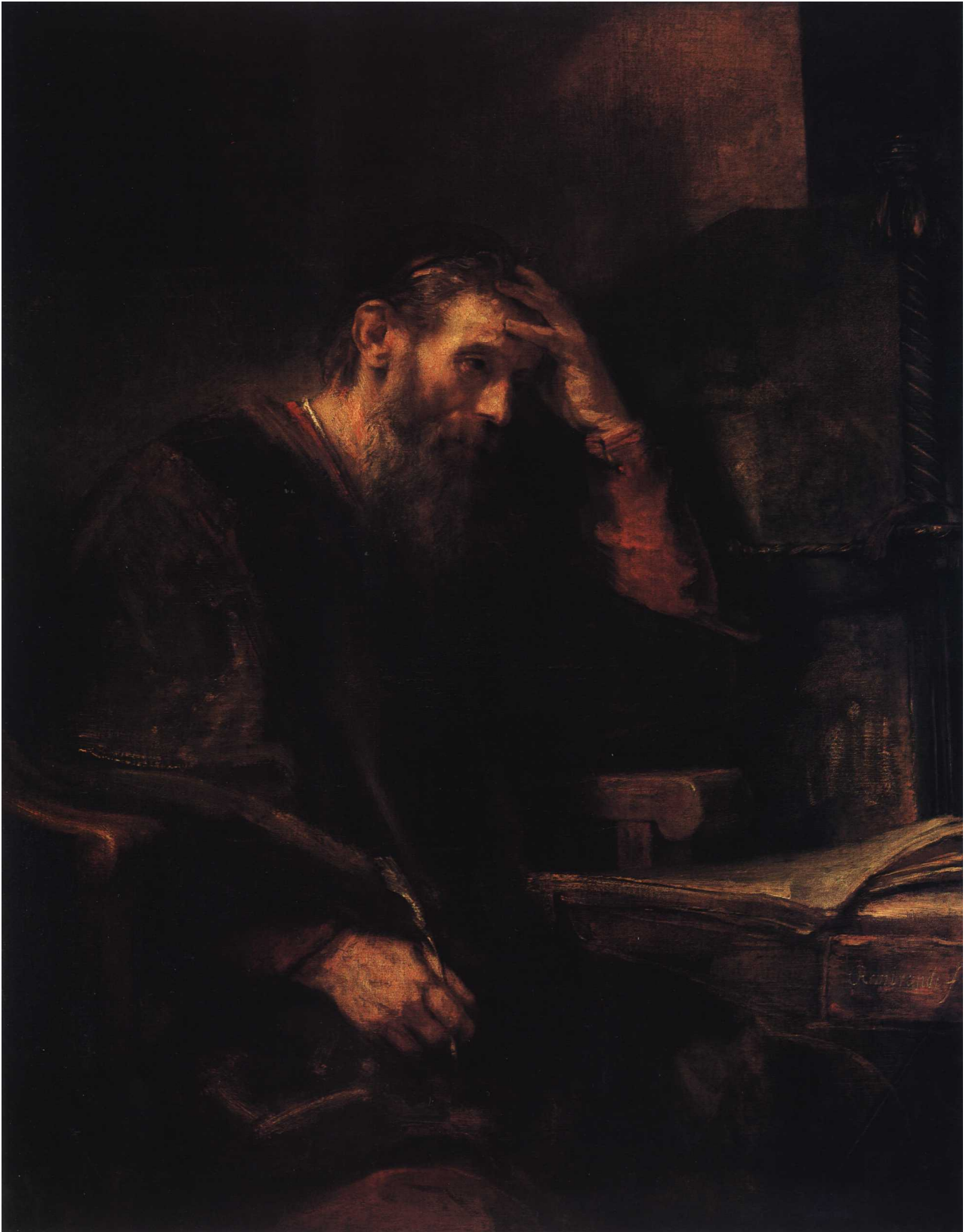


Fig. 2. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-Portrait as the Apostle Paul*, 1661, oil on canvas, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

these three paintings, Rembrandt's concern with Paul, or Saul, was not the dramatic moment in the apostle's life when he was converted to Christianity on the road to Damascus. Rembrandt apparently never depicted, as did so many before him, Saul felled from his horse by a blinding light from heaven, or the companions of Saul accompanying their leader to Damascus, where, after his sight was restored, he was baptized and had his name changed to Paul. Paul the apostle, however, fascinated Rembrandt, perhaps because his writings were the most important source for Reformation theology, or perhaps because he personified the Christian ideal of grace received independently of merit. As Rembrandt grew older and experienced the pain and shame of his unfortunate relationship with Geertje Dirckx and the financial crises of the 1650s, the latter associations must have been strongly felt. Certainly, by the mid-1650s, Rembrandt began to focus on the frailty and the strength of the man, both as Saul, in his moving depiction of *Saul and David* in the Mauritshuis, The Hague,¹ and as the apostle Paul in such paintings as this work and his portrait of *An Elderly Man as Saint Paul* of 1659 (National Gallery, London, inv. no. 243).

The 1627 representation of *Saint Paul* in Stuttgart offers a fascinating point of comparison with the Washington painting; for it demonstrates differences in attitude characteristic of Rembrandt's stylistic and iconographic evolution. Whereas the Rembrandt of 1627 placed Paul in an identifiable environment, where bricks and mortar, wood and straw have been carefully delineated, and where the light source can be specifically identified, the Rembrandt of the late 1650s suppressed such references to time and place. In his later representation he created the sense of the prison cell rather than its specific character. The gentle light that illuminates Paul's head, hand, and epistle, for example, has not passed through the arched opening behind him; indeed, it has no defined point of origin. The late Rembrandt has also brought the viewer closer to the figure of the saint. He depicted Paul at half length rather than full length to allow the viewer to experience more fully the intensity of his expression.

Paul's expression is also markedly different in the two works. Whereas in the Stuttgart painting Paul brings his hand to his mouth and stares into the distance, seemingly uncertain of the meanings of the words inscribed in the tomes surrounding him, in



Rembrandt van Rijn (and Workshop?), *The Apostle Paul*, 1642.9.59



Fig. 3. Rembrandt van Rijn, *A Bearded Man in a Cap*, oil on canvas, 165(7), 78 x 66.5 cm, National Gallery, London

the Washington painting Paul's hand has come to his forehead as though he is pondering the significance of Christ's life. As he stares toward his sword, his demeanor is pensive rather than bewildered. The differences are in part due to the broadness of Rembrandt's mature painting technique, which emphasizes the structure of form without focusing on the specifics of veins, wrinkles, and hair, and in part due to the way light strikes Paul's head, which leaves his eyes obscured in shadow.

The distinctive features of Rembrandt's late Saint Paul are those of a model that the artist occasionally depicted in the 1650s and early 1660s. While this model is most directly represented in two portrait studies, *A Bearded Man in a Cap*, 165[7] (fig. 3), and *A Bearded Man*, 1661 (Hermitage, Saint Petersburg, inv. no. 751), Rembrandt also adapted his features for another contemplative, historicizing painting, *Aristotle Contemplating a Bust of Homer*, 1653 (see p. 310, fig. 1).²

The period of execution for *Saint Paul* can be established not only by comparing the sitter's physiognomy with Rembrandt's other representations of the apostle, but also through stylistic and iconographic means. While the model appears some-

what younger and less wan than he does in the 165[7] *A Bearded Man in a Cap* (fig. 3), the broad modeling in the heads of these two figures is comparable. In each instance Rembrandt has drawn his brush across the canvas with economical strokes that suggest but do not define form. The flesh tones are applied in a single layer over a warm, underlying layer. Features such as the eyes and nose are indicated with planes of color but are not accented with sharp contours. The beard and hair are suggested with long, flowing strokes, in which a few lightly colored strands stand out against the darker forms of the rest.³

Stylistically and iconographically, *Saint Paul* relates closely to a comparably large-scale depiction of *Saint Bartholomew*, which is signed and dated 1657 (fig. 4).⁴ Saint Bartholomew, who leans forward and almost aggressively stares out of the picture with an alert, inquisitive expression enlivening his rugged features, holds before him a knife signifying his martyrdom.⁵ He seems to have an active, dynamic personality in contrast to Saint Paul's more contemplative one, and it has been suggested that the

Fig. 4. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Saint Bartholomew*, 1657, oil on canvas, San Diego, Timken Museum of Art, Putnam Foundation

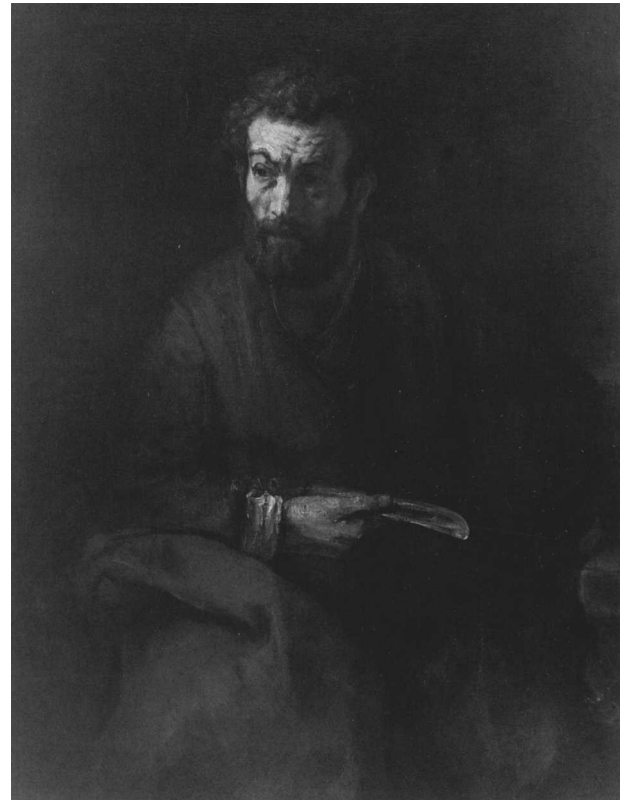


Fig. 5. X-radiograph of 1942.9.59

two works were conceived as complementary images.⁶ If they were, however, technical evidence would suggest that Rembrandt only matched them after having conceived of *Saint Paul* separately; for it was originally painted in a different format.

X-radiographs reveal that Rembrandt, quite remarkably, may have conceived of Saint Paul at the outset as an oval composition (figs. 5 and 6). Lead white from the ground layer was applied in an oval shape, which extended somewhat below and substantially above the present confines of the composition.⁷ The fact that the composition may have originally been oval raises the possibility that the painting was done for a specific commission. One can imagine, for example, that this broadly executed image could have been planned for an architectural setting, to be seen from below.⁸ Apparently a major compositional change accompanied the change in format: the epistles that lie on the desk before Saint Paul were initially propped on a slanted surface at the level of Paul's left elbow. As originally conceived, the apostle was leaning his elbow on the desk in a pose not unlike that of David in Rembrandt's pen and wash drawing *Nathan Admonishing David* of 1654–1655 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Ben. 948). By lowering the surface of the desk, Rembrandt effectively changed the meaning of the gesture of Paul's left hand. Rather than providing physical support for the apostle's head, it emphasizes the spiritual intensity of Saint Paul's thoughts as he ponders the mysteries about which he writes. The x-radiograph also gives the impression that in the original concept the apostle was staring at the epistles before him. In any event, the transformations in the composition, which emphasize the psychological over the physical, give a particularly fascinating insight into Rembrandt's creative process during this period of his career.

Until restoration of this painting, which is covered by very thick and uneven layers of discolored varnish, has been undertaken, it will remain difficult to determine very much about the appearance of the original image. One wonders, for example, whether the sword was in Rembrandt's original concept. It would have been too obscured by the raised desk and too close to the edge of the presumed oval composition to have occupied its present position. If the sword was not present, it may be that the figure was



Fig. 6. Diagram of x-radiograph of 1942.9.59



Fig. 7. Unknown follower of Rembrandt, *Man in a Military Costume*, 1650, oil on panel, Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum

not specifically identified as Saint Paul. He may have represented a philosopher or an Old Testament patriarch.

At this point, it is not possible to determine how the transformation from an oval to a rectangular composition occurred. The x-radiographs indicate that two triangular pieces of a different canvas, with a dense ground of lead white, were attached at the bottom left and right to fill out the rectangular shape. A triangular-shaped canvas piece of a different character and with a different ground was attached to the upper left. A slight addition also fills out the upper right corner. The only one of these additions visible in infrared examination, the lower right, absorbs light in such a way as to suggest it is a later addition, or at least that it was totally overpainted. In any event, the painting was probably in a rectangular format by the eighteenth century; for no mention of an oval- or octagonal-shaped painting occurs in the earliest reference to this work, which is the Johan van Schuylenburg sale of 20 September 1735.

While a proper assessment of the work cannot really be made because of the abrasion, overpaint, and heavy layers of discolored varnish, the paint

surface on the large central canvas appears to be continuous, an indication that the alterations in the composition were done in close sequence to the original concept. The areas where the primary alterations can be distinguished, the table, epistles, and background above them, are executed with broad, somewhat dry strokes of the brush that appear to be consistent with Rembrandt's technique. The sword, however, has a different character. Its handle is quite carefully modeled and lacks the freedom of execution evident in the rest of the painting. The sword's shape, and the relatively smooth painting technique used for it, is comparable to the sword in the painting *Man in a Military Costume* by an unknown follower of Rembrandt in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (fig. 7). It may well be that this artist was responsible for introducing Paul's attribute, either at Rembrandt's request or at a later date after the painting had left Rembrandt's workshop. Whether or not more extensive workshop participation existed on this painting cannot be determined from its present unrestored state. The signature, however, was almost certainly added later. Painted in lead white, it is unusually pronounced and sits on top of the surface. The letters are not brushed in a fluid manner. Since the signature comes just to the edge of the original canvas, its position raises the possibility that the painting's composition was altered in two stages: first from an oval to an octagonal shape before being enlarged to its present rectangular shape.

Notes

1. For the most reasoned assessment of the attribution of this painting, with which I agree, see De Vries, Toth-Ubbens, and Froentjes 1978, 148–165. The authors argue that the painting was executed at two distinct periods, about 1655 and about 1660–1665.

2. Benesch 1956, 339–340. Although Held 1969, 29, does not mention *Saint Paul* when discussing the model for Aristotle, he does associate this model with one other painting, *An Old Man Wearing a Linen Head-Band*, 1651 (Br. 263).

3. The primary difference is that the head of Saint Paul is executed in somewhat dryer, thinner paints, which may well be a function of the figure's more abstracted nature. The large scale of the Washington painting also suggests that it was designed to be seen from a distance, a factor that may also have affected Rembrandt's manner of execution.

4. Br. 613. This painting measures 126.5 x 100.5 cm.

5. One of Christ's disciples, Bartholomew, is thought to have been flayed alive and then crucified by heathens on his return home from teaching in Armenia.

6. Benesch 1956, 338, suggested that Rembrandt planned a cycle of apostles that never progressed past these two paintings. This interesting hypothesis, however, cannot be substantiated by documentary evidence. Since no iconographic tradition for juxtaposing these two apostles exists, it would seem that the two works were conceived separately.

Rembrandt based *Saint Bartholomew* on a model found in other paintings (see *A Bearded Man*, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, inv. no. 2060) in much the same way that he based *Saint Paul* on a model.

7. No other large-scale paintings depicting apostles or evangelists are known to have been painted in an oval format. Rembrandt's *The Risen Christ*, 1661 (Alte Pinakothek, Munich, inv. no. 6471; Br. 630), was cut into an oval form at some point in its history, but was probably conceived as a rectangular painting. The central portion of Rembrandt's *Christ in the Hyde Collection*, Glens Falls, New York (Br. 628), was also cut into an irregular oval before being reattached to the original canvas.

8. No commission for such a work is known.

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 1965 NGA: 110, no. 655.
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 1986 Tümpel: 339, 421, 343, repro.
 1986 Guillaud and Guillaud: 528, no. 615, repro.

1942.9.65 (661)

Rembrandt van Rijn

Philemon and Baucis

1658

Oil on wood,¹ 54.5 x 68.5 (21½ x 27)

Widener Collection

Inscriptions

At lower left: *Rembrandt f. 1658*

Technical Notes: The painting has been transferred and is now on a cradled, horizontally grained wood panel with a layer of gauze between the panel and paint layer. The original support also appears to have been wood. No ground layer is present; it was probably removed during transfer.

The paint is applied in successive, medium-rich layers of varying thickness, with broad and free brushmarking giving way to finer strokes in the faces. X-radiographs indicate that Mercury's right arm was originally higher and extended farther from his body. The upper edge of this underlying arm is now visible on the surface as a thin, white line. The nature of this line was mistaken by a previous restorer, who used it to form the upper edge of the glass that Mercury now appears to hold. The paint has suffered severe abrasion, particularly in the darks where the gauze interleaf is visible. Extensive repainting and reinforcement is found throughout.

A discolored, aged, natural resin varnish is present. Because of the extensive losses in the painting the decision was made in 1977 not to remove the old, somewhat disfiguring overpaint and discolored varnish. Conservation was undertaken only to consolidate flaking and cupped paint.

Provenance: Captain William Baillie [1723–1792], London; (his sale, Langford & Son, London, 1–2 February 1771, no. 73). Possibly English private collection by 1772.² Major Stanton; (sale, Christie & Ansell, London, 1 February 1777, no. 75); Moris.³ (Charles Sedelmeyer, Paris); Charles T. Yerkes [1839–1905], Chicago, by 1893; (sale, American Art Association, New York, 8 April 1910, no. 1160); (Scott and Fowles, New York); Otto H. Kahn [1867–1934], New York, by 1914; (Scott and Fowles, New York); Joseph E. Widener, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, in 1922;⁴ inheritance from Estate of Peter A. B. Widener by gift through power of appointment of Joseph E. Widener, after purchase by funds of the Estate.

Exhibited: *Paintings by Old Masters of the Dutch, Flemish, Italian, French, and English Schools*, Charles Sedelmeyer Galleries, Paris, 1898, no. 137. *Fiftieth Anniversary Exhibition*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1920, no. 9. *Rembrandt Paintings, Drawings, and Etchings*, Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1922.⁵ Washington 1969, no. 18.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* provided Dutch artists with a wide range of mythological subjects, most of which contain underlying moralizing messages on human behavior. Surprisingly, the story of the visit of Jupiter and Mercury to the aged couple Philemon and Baucis, described by Ovid in the eighth book of